

3,898 ha. set for bamboo plantation in W. Visayas

By **BusinessMirror**

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In Photo: Bamboo harvesting in Maasin, Iloilo.

A farmers' bamboo-propagation skills-building program has been carried out in Iloilo bamboo capital, Maasin town, as part of government's target to plant bamboo on 3,898 hectares in Western Visayas.

Farmers in Iloilo have started training on bamboo planting, having been encouraged of bamboo's high return on investment and quicker payback compared to other long-gestating crops.

Bamboo plantations are hoped to flourish in the Western Visayas provinces of Aklan, Antique, Capiz, Iloilo and Guimaras after this first bamboo-planting training in Maasin, according to Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau (ERDB) Executive Director Dr. Henry A. Adornado.

“Bamboo is considered to be the best conservation material, because of its low maintenance compared to other plantations, besides the fact that there is a high return on investment [ROI] and faster payback in bamboo,” Adornado said.

The Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Monitor placed bamboo’s ROI at 26 percent, based on studied plantations in Central America.

A total of 68 farmers and bamboo-industry leaders were trained by the ERDB on bamboo propagation, plantation development and rehabilitation.

Adornado said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, ERDB’s mother agency, is targeting to plant bamboo on 1 million hectares. It will be part of the extension of the National Greening Program (NGP) up to 2022.

The enhanced NGP will rehabilitate the remaining 7.1 million hectares of denuded areas in the Philippines using species such as bamboo. “This learning event will help solve the shortage of raw materials for the bamboo industry. This is also in line with the government’s goal of reducing poverty, mitigating climate change, rehabilitating watersheds and conserving biodiversity,” Adornado said.

The Biodiversity, Coastal, Wetlands, Ecotourism Research Center (BCWERC) urged Western Visayas farmers to practice science-based planting systems to enable more bamboo plants to survive.

“We are a bamboo-producing region, and we have an abundant bamboo supply in Maasin, Iloilo. But we should plant and grow bamboo in a science-based manner,” said Dr. Alicia L. Lustica, BCWERC head.

Specific components of the training, which was administered by forester Gregorio E. Santos Jr., are preparation of potting media, nursery management, plantation maintenance, bamboo-stands management, harvesting, enterprise development and action planning. Bamboo is considered as the “green gold of life” and “grass of hope” with its wide range of application and growing relevance.

It can sequester 12 tons of carbon dioxide per hectare per year. It is an effective tool in addressing soil erosion, landslides and flooding. Bamboo is also edible. Its shoots are a source of food rich in fiber, nutrients, and vitamins A, B and C. Besides its use for furniture and handicrafts, bamboo is also used in fiber, clothing, pulp and paper production, food ingredients, beauty products, architecture and construction.

To expand bamboo-products manufacturing, ERDB has partnered with the departments of Science and Technology, and Trade and Industry on value-adding and marketing of bamboo products.

Bamboo plants are known to be the “fastest-growing woody plants in the world, with a growth rate of 24 inches daily. This is because it has a unique rhizome-dependent system,” according to the Plantations International.

According to Western Visayas Agriculture and Resources Research and Development Consortium (Westvardec), Iloilo has 8,085 hectares of bamboo area, producing 2.42 million poles every year.

Iloilo supplies raw-material requirements for 41 manufacturers, 32 domestic producers and nine exporters. Iloilo plans to establish plantations on a total of 58,200 hectares.

“Aside from its household and industrial use, Iloilo, has been experimenting on other possible uses of bamboo. It is used for preparing food. Mixes of tender bamboo shoots are used to clean wounds and treat ulcers. Bamboo leaves are used to fight spastic disorders and bleeding conditions, as well as diarrhea and stomach disorders,” according to *My Beautiful Iloilo*.

Bamboo shoots are made of 88.8-percent moisture, 3.9-percent protein, 0.5-percent fat, 5.7-percent carbohydrates and 1.1 minerals. “Its amino-acid content is higher than cabbage, carrot, onion and pumpkin. Bamboo also contains 17 different types of enzymes and more than 10 kinds of mineral elements, such as chromium, zinc, manganese, iron, magnesium, nickel and cobalt.” Maasin’s major product is bamboo charcoal. The company Iloilo Kawayan Marketing in Maasin produces the charcoal that is considered to be a natural product and is ecologically friendly.

“Used as a fuel, it is smokeless and odorless, and is best for barbecues. Bamboo charcoal works as a natural fertilizer and pesticide. It is also used as a deodorizer. It can filter tap water. Put pieces of bamboo charcoal in a jug of tap water, then leave it for four to five hours. The water in the jug will taste like mineral water.”

With its antimicrobial, antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal properties, bamboo charcoal is now used as soap ingredient.

“It cleans the skin deeply. Because of the incredible absorbency of the bamboo charcoal with activated carbon, the soap can clean to the very bottom of skin pores and does not leave a residue on the face. The newly cleaned skin pores can receive natural moisturizing from the body’s oils.”

With its ability to clean skin pore thoroughly, it can then moisturize the skin. It is a solution to acne problems.

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